

**Gerard Lemos**, *The End of the Chinese Dream: Why Chinese People Fear the Future*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, 301 pp. ISBN 9780300169249 (hardback).

In the early twenty-first century, China is undergoing a historic transformation. The 'Chinese dream', which emerged as the times required, has also undergone change. What is the Chinese dream? Is it attainable? What are ordinary Chinese people's expectations for the future? Different people have different views. *The End of the Chinese Dream* by Gerard Lemos concerns ordinary Chinese people in Chongqing and Beijing, and gives thought-provoking answers to these questions.

As a senior scholar in social policy, Lemos was the former chairman of the board of the British Council (2008-2010). In this thought-provoking book, Lemos develops a creative field survey approach called 'wish tree'. From 2006 to 2010, as a visiting professor at Chongqing Technology and Business University, Lemos conducted an independent survey of Chongqing and Beijing residents in selected neighbourhoods. In specified public places, Chinese residents pasted postcards with a leaf design on the wish tree. Each postcard had four questions: Who are you? What event changed your life? What is your biggest worry? What do you wish for? In contrast to straightforward questionnaires, the unique approach of the wish tree succeeded at collecting 'large amounts of reliable information' and exploring ordinary Chinese citizens' concerns and expectations for the future (p. 15).

This book has a brief introduction, 14 chapters and an afterword. Chapters 1-4 describe life in Chongqing and Beijing and the field research as it was carried out in these two cities, and provide an overview of China's changing political landscape since 1978. According to the responses of ordinary Chinese people, Chapter 5 identifies the Chinese dream as 'their family's well-being, keeping their job, not getting sick, affording medical treatment, paying for their child's education, having enough to live on in their old age and living in a neighbourly, supportive community' (p. 103). In the chapters that follow (6-10), Lemos analyzes whether the Chinese dream of the everyday citizens of Chongqing and Beijing is viable. He explores the five challenges facing the Chinese dream: family life, educational pressure, health care, lifelong financial security and environmental sustainability. In Lemos' opinion, the Chinese dream is at an end. In Chapters 11-14, Lemos explains the negative impacts of the death of the Chinese dream and advances some solutions for more balanced and humane social policies in China. As Lemos argues, to a large extent, the traditional social order has been destroyed. Though

the competing interests of family life, education, health care, financial security and environmental sustainability are addressed by a series of piecemeal policies, there seems to be no cohesive framework standing the test of time.

Based on the survey in selected communities in Chongqing and Beijing, Lemos concludes that China is controlled by 'an interconnected, mutually dependent but mistrusted and faction-ridden plutocracy', which focuses on 'the creation and consolidation of wealth in their own hands' (p. 271). However, on the basis of a survey of thousands of Chinese, we should not conclude that the Chinese dream has come to an end, as the dream is shared by hundreds of millions of people in China.

In my view, the anxiousness and fears echoed in the responses on the wish tree are common in many other countries around the world. That is to say, if another wish tree-style survey was conducted in communities in other countries, it would get similar responses. For example, if the supporters of the Occupy Wall Street movement were asked the four questions Lemos asked the Chinese, their responses would also refer to income inequality and wealth distribution in the United States. If such a survey were conducted in Detroit's communities, where many people are living in poverty, they might express fears similar to those of the Chinese respondents in Chongqing and Beijing. Should we refute the American dream on the basis of some negative responses from Americans?

*The End of the Chinese Dream* still ranks as one of the works on the Chinese dream most worth reading. This book provides an alternative look into the controversial topics of the Chinese dream, addresses multifaceted aspects of the future expectations of ordinary Chinese and analyzes the challenges facing the Chinese dream and the relevant negative impacts. This timely and controversial book is crucial to understand the dark sides of the Chinese dream, and for the development of future research. If Lemos is correct, our understanding of the Chinese dream should be revised. This book should be required reading for serious social policy makers, scholars and students who are interested in social policy in China.

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